



The Marine Barracks Charlestown Navy Yard

The United States Marines Corps, established in 1798 as a separate service within the Department of the Navy, is traditionally known for protecting bases, ships, and diplomatic missions, and as a formidable landing force during invasions.

The first U.S. Marines in the Boston area were quartered on Castle Island in 1799. In 1800 the U.S. Government



Marine Barracks ca.1850

bought the 35 acres in Charlestown, Massachusetts known as Moulton's Point to create the Charlestown Navy Yard. Twenty five years earlier, Moulton's Point had been the landing site for British forces (including the British Marines, the original model for the U.S. Marines) at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

In March 1801 a detail of one sergeant, one corporal and eight enlisted Marines was sent to the Charlestown Navy Yard to provide support for the *USS Constitution* until it sailed in August 1803. On June 5, 1805, the Secretary of the Navy established the first permanent Marine detachment at the yard consisting of one lieutenant, one sergeant, three corporals and fifteen privates. On the same date he directed "a small house built" to serve as a barracks for the enlisted men.

The Marine Barracks in Charlestown, known within the Navy Yard as "Quarters I", ranks high in the tradition of the U.S. Marine Corps. Built between 1810 and 1811, it is the nation's oldest surviving U.S. Marine barracks building. The Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., was actually built first, in 1801, but the original building was torn down and rebuilt. The Washington D.C. barracks is considered the oldest U.S. Marine barracks *site* while the Charlestown Navy Yard has the oldest Marine barracks building.



Marine Barracks ca.1880

In its operating period, the Marine detachment at the Charlestown Navy Yard had 146 commanders, beginning with Captain Henry Caldwell, and ending in 1974, with Lieutenant Colonel John R. Yates, Jr. Briefly in 1836, the Charlestown Navy Yard Marines were commanded by a non-commissioned officer, Sergeant E.C. Young.



The Charlestown Navy Yard Marine Barracks building was originally a one story center section flanked by three story wings on each side. Enlisted men occupied the center portion and the officers lived in the spacious apartments on the ends of the building.



circa 1880

The center portion has been replaced but the East and West wings are part of the original structure.

Around 1870, the center was expanded to three floors and the fourth was added about 1900. The front porch and stair towers were added by Works Progress Administration workers in the 1930s and the porch was enclosed in during World War II.

A Marine Barracks is a small tightly knit community of Marine Corps men and women. In the Charlestown Navy Yard., the Marine Barracks was its own world. The Marine Corps personnel slept, ate, and socialized inside the building. Any personal supplies and services they needed they could get from services such as the exchange and the barber shop which were located in the barracks building.



Marine Barracks 1902

The barracks at Charlestown was constructed in various stages and most of the original building's work was done by the Marines themselves.

During World War II, with detachments sent to South Boston, Squantum, Chelsea, Lockwood's Basin, Woods Hole, and Chatham, the

troop strength of the Marine Barracks grew to nineteen officers and 624 enlisted men.



Marine Barracks 1941

In 1974 the U.S. Government officially closed the Charlestown Navy Yard (also known as the Boston Naval Shipyard) and the original 30 acres were transferred to the National Park Service. Since then, the Marine Barracks has become an integral part of Boston National Historical Park.

It is part of the mission of Boston National Historical Park to preserve significant Charlestown Navy Yard structures such as the Marine Barracks. Although the interior of the building has changed, the exterior remains as it



Marine Barracks ca.1990

was when the Navy Yard closed in 1974. Today, the names of the last officers to reside in the Marine Barracks are still visible. They remain a reminder of the long history of brave and gallant service provided by the U.S. Marine Corps personnel who protected the Charlestown Navy Yard and preserved American democracy.

